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Keeping Women in their *Historic* Places
Bringing Women's Stories to the Classroom

Historic places connect us to, and teach us about, the past. They have interesting and important stories to impart which they convey with an often surprising immediacy and power. The power of these places can be brought into the classroom. Many educators have echoed the words of John Patrick, professor of education at Indiana University, who said that historic places "can be used by teachers and students as objects of inquiry, in the same way that written primary sources are used in the classrooms of good history teachers."[1]

Using properties listed in the National Register of Historic Places, the Teaching with Historic Places program has created instructional materials that reflect the richness, complexity, and diversity of the historic and cultural resources around us. Our experience offers some insights into using places to teach women's history.

While the National Register of Historic Places has included places associated with women since its beginning, places recognized **because of** those associations with women came shockingly late—not until the 1970s[2]—and still make up only a small percentage of the whole (see Carol Shull's article, p.12). There remains a great need to identify and recognize additional historic properties important in women's history and to re-examine other properties for previously unrecognized significance.

Like the National Register properties on which they are based, the lessons created by the Teaching with Historic Places program vary in the extent to which they discuss women. Five of the 92 lesson plans published or currently in draft focus on famous women. Another tells the story of a woman homesteader in Colorado, and five more include women as key figures in the main theme. For example, the lesson on John Marshall's Richmond, Virginia, house focuses on the degree to which Marshall's personal values—reflected in part through his home life and relationship with his wife, Polly—influenced his public actions and decisions. The lesson on Montpelier emphasizes Dolley Madison, as well as her husband, James, in examining both the daily life of the ex-president and the various contemporary views on slavery.

While not all Teaching with Historic Places lessons deal directly with the lives of individual women, many clearly acknowledge women's contributions or have obvious potential for broadening the lesson's main message.

- Knife River Indian Villages (National Historic Sites) in North Dakota explain the matriarchal traditions of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara tribes. Men entered their wive's households when they married. Women built, owned, and maintained the lodges and gardens.
- The Old Courthouse in Saint Louis, (Jefferson National Expansion Memorial) site of the Dred Scott Trial, includes his rarely-mentioned wife, Harriet, who was also a party in the lawsuit.
- The lesson on the sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens (National Historic Site) includes information on the Cornish Colony, a group of artists and literati who settled around Saint Gaudens' New Hampshire home and which included a number of women. Women active in the Cornish Colony included actress Ethel Barrymore; Lucia Fuller, a painter known primarily for miniatures who also created murals for the Women's Building of the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893; and Maude Howe Elliott, a writer whose 1915 *Julia Ward Howe, 1819-1910* won a Pulitzer Prize.

Eleanor Roosevelt holds a copy of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, *a document considered by many to be her greatest achievement. How could this document be used in conjunction with Roosevelt's home, Val-Kill, to help students understand her better? Photo courtesy Franklin D. Roosevelt Museum and Library Collection.*

Sometimes an important part of teaching about women occurs simply in recognizing female presence. Many Teaching with Historic Places lessons deal with broad themes, such as ways of life associated with specific cultural or economic groups, areas of the country, and/or time periods in which women clearly played important roles. A reading on the later history of the Decatur House in Washington, DC, contains telling information on the lives and employment of early-19th-century widows. The Saugus Iron Works lesson relates the types of duties women occasionally took over as "deputy husbands" at that colonial Massachusetts site. In the Acadia lesson, readers learn what 18th- and 19th-century life was like for whole families living on islands off the coast of Maine. The lesson conveys the characteristically isolated and self-sufficient life of early settlers through the story of William and Hannah Gilley, who transformed a previously uninhabited island into a farm. The Gilleys and their 12 children caught, raised, or grew their own food; produced material from which to make their own clothing; and purchased only a few essentials from a store seven miles across the water. Hannah taught her children to read and, on most summer Sundays, took them to church seven miles each way in an open boat. Opportunities abound for expanding traditional interpretations to find women's contributions to the events, associations, and qualities that make a place significant.

It is not enough, however, to identify the role of women and learn their interesting, even important, stories. To reach classrooms, materials must clearly fit within established curricula. Teachers regularly lament the "extra" topics they are requested to add to what they are required to teach. Obtaining state or local curriculum is always useful; perusing major textbooks also can provide information on basic topics and themes. Seeking input from educators, developing working relationships with them, and enlisting them to review and comment on educational materials also helps ensure the usefulness of place-based lessons in the classroom.

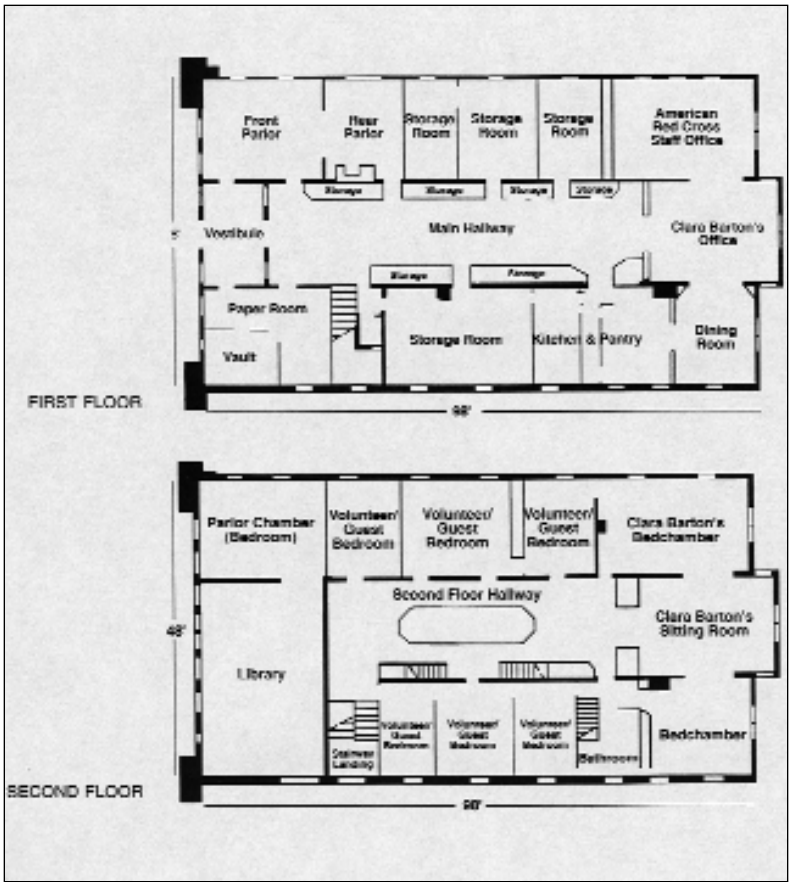
The Teaching with Historic Places approach to selecting topics and places has been to design lessons as case studies of topics already covered in typical textbook chapters, while providing those perspectives lacking or covered only briefly. Everyone teaches about the antebellum South, but the plantations discussed mostly grew tobacco and cotton. We selected rice plantations in South Carolina. While not primarily about women, this lesson mentions that the daughter of one of the plantation owners, Elizabeth Waties Allston Pringle, later wrote two books about plantation life. After the Civil War, the widowed Pringle purchased and ran two plantations of her own, including her father's.

The lesson on the Adeline Hornbek House in Colorado complements units on the 1862 Homestead Act, Western migration and settlement, and Manifest Destiny, yet tells that common story from the less commonly-told perspective of a female head-of-household. Widowed in her early 30s while living in Colorado with three small children, Adeline Hornbek took advantage of the 1862 Homestead Act to purchase 80 acres. Later, as a single mother separated from her second husband, she built a ranch in the Flourissant Valley and increased its value nearly five times in seven years. Her log house was the first in the valley with two stories.

The lesson on millionaire entrepreneurs J. C. Penney and Madam C. J. Walker is appropriate for units on turn-of-the-century business, while providing a contrast to typical textbook coverage of "robber barons" in the Gilded Age.

Places themselves are primary documents that convey information through their materials, design, craftsmanship, location, spatial arrangement, relationship with other resources, associated furnishings and artifacts, and other characteristics. Places neither represent the whole story nor embody the whole truth, any more than written documents, photographs, objects, or other single

First and second floor plans of Clara Barton's home in Glen Echo,Maryland. What insight does the disposition of rooms provide into Barton's lifestyle? How much distinction is there between her professional and personal space? Photo courtesy Clara Barton National Historic Site.

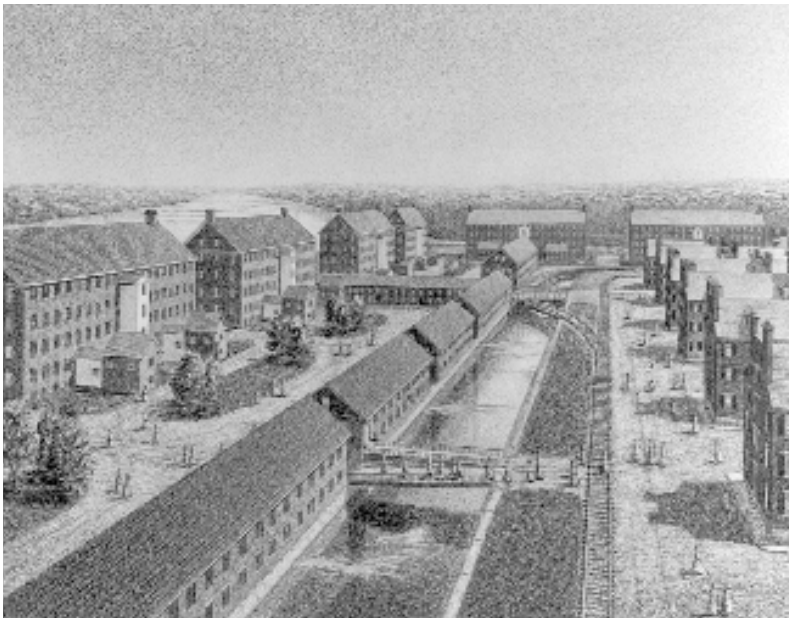


types of evidence do. Places and documents used together help create what many educators call an "empathetic understanding" of the past, something essential if we are truly to comprehend the lessons of history. Documents studied before visits help students prepare for what they will see, experience, and learn at the place. Used after a visit, they reinforce what was learned. When visits are not possible, documents become the key to making places real and relevant to students.

Documents complement places in many ways. They can help enliven the place and the events that occurred there. Photographs showing row after row of sowers in fields that fade into the horizon bring a jolt of awareness that words alone cannot convey about the scale of "bonanza" wheat farming in North Dakota in the 1880s. Excerpts from Mary Dodge Woodward's diary, who helped her son manage one of these immense farms, illustrates the links between them, the railroads, and the Minneapolis flour mills.

By helping us understand the personalities and qualities of people who make places important, documents also make these people more dynamic and real to us. The lesson on the Madam C. J. Walker Building in Indianapolis includes her comments at the 1912 Convention of the National Negro Business League. No women were scheduled to speak there. Seizing the podium from Booker T. Washington, Walker said, "Surely you are not going to shut the door in my face. I feel that I am in a business that is a credit to the womanhood of our race...."[3] Madam Walker was on the convention's 1913 agenda.

Lessons about places can use documents to provide historical context for the events or people associated with the place. Excerpts from articles in *Godey's Lady's Book Magazine* of the 1860s provide both context for—and contrast to—the life of homesteader Adeline Hornbek. Finally, documents provide factual information, fill in gaps, and raise additional questions for further inquiry. Charts of U.S. Census data from 1860-1880 show the 20-year evolution of the upper-middle class Cincinnati household that nurtured William Howard Taft in the virtues of public service. A glance at the gender, age, and turnover of the Taft household staff helps us understand his upbringing and raises possibilities for additional research on households of various periods and classes. In the lesson on California's Rancho Los Alamitos, a series of five floor plans dating from the early 1800s to 1925 show the evolution of a 4-room adobe into an 18-room ranch house, mirroring both the ranch's growing prosperity under a series of owners and the broader cultural transformation taking place throughout the state.



Drawing of Boott Cotton Mills, Lowell, Massachusetts, as it appeared c. 1850.What does this drawing reveal about the work environment and living conditions of the famous Lowell mill girls? Courtesy Lowell National Historical Park; Kirk Doggett, Illustrator.

Primary documents, along with artifacts, are the most exciting and evocative supplemental materials to a place; but secondary sources are vital too. Places and their meaning must be placed in their historic context, and narrative is often the most efficient way to accomplish that. One of the benefits of using National Register properties in the classroom is that these places are already identified, researched, and documented—some more thoroughly and reliably than others, and some reflecting more recent scholarship than others. Some contain ready-to-use documents already in the public domain. All National Register properties have modern photographs, maps, and bibliographies. If there are no adequate primary documents, then maps, drawings, or renderings of places and their environments during their historic periods may need to be created. If not overdone, color slides, videos, and sound recordings also can enhance students' understanding of places.

Teaching with Historic Places lesson plans end with a section, "Putting It All Together." Through three-to-four activities, students put together the facts and ideas they have learned from the documents to form "the big picture," practicing higher-order thinking skills of synthesis and analysis. These projects are also the principal means by which students become historians and engage in the excitement of discovery about the past. This sense of excitement is the most powerful tool we have for motivating people—children or adults—to learn history.

Activities may include research, writing (reports, letters, journals, newspaper articles, etc.), debates, dramatic productions, exhibits, artistic creations, inventions, time lines, oral histories, or group discussions—according to the students' ages. An obvious activity asks students to conduct additional research on the person studied, with

Visitors to Mammoth Cave, Kentucky, pose with their guide, c. 1900. Would students be surprised to learn how some turn-of-the-century women chose to spend their leisure time? Photo courtesy Mammoth Cave National Park.

the results of that research taking many forms. Even more creative activities are also possible:

- The lesson on Madam C. J. Walker asks students to design a new successful business today and to create an advertisement for a product.
- Eleanor Roosevelt's life and visitors at Val-Kill reveal her interest in peoples throughout the world. That interest was also reflected in her role as chief author of the United Nation's *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, a document included in the Val-Kill lesson plan in which students compare it with the *Bill of Rights* and write their own declaration of human rights as a class. Not only does this lead students to contemplate basic concepts of humanity, but also it demonstrates the complexity and difficulty of the task and the extent of Roosevelt's achievement.
- The lesson on Clara Barton asks students to hold a class discussion on the differences between jobs for men and women and on the meanings of equality and to write a letter on that topic to the editor of a local newspaper.

A characteristic Teaching with Historic Places activity directs students to compare and contrast their communities' histories and places with those in the lesson. This process, as well as activities such as those in the Roosevelt and Barton lessons, also relate to citizenship, a topic of increasing interest to today's educators, strengthening the appeal to teachers.

Even a curriculum-based lesson based on an important place, filled with fascinating documents and stimulating activities, falls short if it does not reach its intended audience of teachers and students. Partnerships between educators and content-specialists in the creation of instructional materials result in stronger products and can help get these products into the classroom. In the development of the Teaching with Historic Places program, we have relied on many partners. These include, among others, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, with whom we initiated the program; historian-educator Fay Metcalf, who developed our lesson plan format; the National Council for the Social Studies, whose professional journal—estimated to reach tens of thousands of teachers—has reprinted some of the lesson plans; National Park Service units and other historic sites on which lessons have been written; the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers and historic preservation officers of individual states; education departments of George Mason University and Boston University; the National History Education Network; National History Day; and many individual classroom teachers and other educators. Through an agreement with the National Park Foundation, Jackdaw Publications, a publisher well known among teachers for its portfolios of facsimile primary documents, now publishes and distributes Teaching with Historic Places lesson plans.[4]

The goals of Teaching with Historic Places are to make places and the information about them natural tools for classroom teachers to use as textbooks, wall maps, and worksheets and also to open both teachers' and students' eyes to see and appreciate the places in their own communities in new ways. We believe that using places to study the well-known and to discover the lesser-known stories of women will help accomplish those goals.

Notes

1 John J. Patrick, "Prominent Places for Historic Places: K-12 Social Studies Curriculum," *CRM: Teaching with Historic Places*, Vol. 16, No. 2, 1993.

2 Page Putnam Miller, ed., *Reclaiming the Past: Landmarks of Women's History* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 4.

3 *Report of the Thirteenth Annual Convention of the National Negro Business League*, Chicago IL, August 21-23, 1912, William H. Davis, Official Stenographer (Washington, DC, 154-55); from the draft Teaching with Historic Places lesson plan, "Two American Entrepreneurs: Madam C. J. Walker and J. C. Penney."

4 For information on ordering lesson plans, contact Jackdaw Publications, P.O. Box 503, Amawalk, New York 10501; telephone 800-789-0022.

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